

THE  
COMMON SCHOOL JOURNAL.

VOL. I.

BOSTON, AUGUST 15, 1839.

No. 16.

[In the Prospectus of our Publishers, it was stated, that this Journal would be made the depository of the Reports of the Massachusetts Board of Education. Our columns having hitherto been occupied by the publication of the laws of the Commonwealth on the subject of Public Instruction, by expositions of the duties of school and prudential committee men, by a presentation of motives which should actuate teachers, &c. &c.,—subjects more especially appropriate to the season that has passed, and forming the most suitable topics for the early numbers of a work of this kind—we have been obliged to defer the promised publication of the Reports, until the present time. With this number, the publication is commenced, and will, *probably*, be continued, through several numbers, until completed.—ED.]

FIRST ANNUAL REPORT OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION.

The Board of Education, created by an act of the Legislature, approved 20th April, 1837, ask permission to submit their First Annual Report.

The Board held its first meeting in the Council Chamber in Boston, on the 29th June, 1837. Authority having been given, by the law creating the Board, to appoint a Secretary, the Honorable Horace Mann, late President of the Senate of the Commonwealth, was elected by ballot to that office. It being provided that the Secretary should receive a reasonable compensation for his services, not exceeding one thousand dollars per annum, it was unanimously agreed by the Board, that this sum should be allowed as his salary; it being understood that he should devote himself exclusively to the duties of his office. On this subject, the Board will ask permission to make a few observations in the sequel of their report.

The duties of the Board, as prescribed by the statute, are, 1st, to prepare and lay before the Legislature, in a printed form, on or before the second Wednesday in January, annually, an abstract of the school returns received by the Secretary of the Commonwealth, and 2d, to make a detailed report to the Legislature of all their doings, with such observations as their experience and reflection may suggest, upon the condition and efficiency of our system of popular education, and the most practicable means of improving and extending it.

The first duty has been discharged. The Board at an early day confided to their Secretary the duty of preparing an abstract of the school returns. This abstract has been duly submitted to the Legislature, in a highly convenient form. The recapitulation at its close, supersedes the necessity of presenting in this place any summary of its contents. Imperfect as such a document must necessarily be, it comprises a great amount of valuable information. The Board are of opinion, that, by such improvements as experience may suggest, it will be in their power,—if authority be granted to them,—to render it still more instructive and useful. It is respectfully recommended, that power be granted to the Board, by the Legislature, to direct such amendments in the mode and time of making the returns, and in the mode of keeping the school-register, as will more effectually answer the purposes for which the returns are directed to be made.

It is made the duty of the Secretary, "under the direction of the Board, to collect information of the actual condition and efficiency of the common schools and other means of popular education; and to diffuse as widely as possible, throughout every part of the Commonwealth, information of the most approved and successful methods of arranging the studies and conducting the education of the young."

The limited powers conferred on the Board, left them scarce any discretion in the choice of the means, by which they could enable their Secretary to discharge his duty as thus prescribed. It was necessary to depend almost exclusively on the voluntary cooperation of the people; and no way suggested itself in which this cooperation could be given so effectually, as through the medium of conventions, called in each county of the Commonwealth, to be composed of teachers, school-committee men, and the friends of education generally, deputed from the several towns to attend these conventions. The conventions were so arranged as to time, as to be held successively at convenient intervals throughout the State, in order that the presence of the Secretary of the Board might be given at each county convention. It was the purpose of the Board, that these meetings should also be attended by such members of their own body, as from their place of residence were able conveniently to be present, and this, when other engagements permitted, has been done. In pursuance of these views, an address was issued by the Board to the people of the Commonwealth, a copy of which will be found subjoined to the Report of the Secretary, herewith presented.

By way of preparation for the county conventions, a series of questions was prepared by the Secretary, and widely circulated throughout the Commonwealth, for the purpose of drawing forth and concentrating information on the most important points, connected with the subject of education. A copy of these questions is also subjoined.

At the appointed time, the circuit of the county conventions was commenced by their Secretary, and the Board feel warranted in saying, that his attendance and public addresses at these meetings were productive of the happiest effects. Seconded by an enlightened zeal for the improvement of education, on the part of those by whom these conventions were attended, it is believed that his services and efforts have been highly instrumental in awakening a new interest in the cause of school education. At the semi-annual meeting of the Board, on the first day of the present month, a detailed REPORT of his proceedings was submitted by the Secretary, with various observations on the leading topics which had engaged his attention, in the discharge of his duty. This document will be found appended to the present report, and the Board refer to it with great satisfaction, as a result of the organization of the Board of Education for the first year of its existence, in the highest degree creditable to its author, and likely to prove equally beneficial to the cause of education and acceptable to the people of the Commonwealth.

It is not the province of the Board of Education to submit to the Legislature, in the form of specific projects of law, those measures, which they may deem advisable for the improvement of the schools and the promotion of the cause of education. That duty is respectfully left by the Board, with the wisdom of the Legislature and its committees, on whom it is by usage devolved. Neither will it be expected of the Board, on the present occasion, to engage in a lengthened discussion of topics, fully treated in their Secretary's report, to which they beg leave to refer, as embodying a great amount of fact, and the result of extensive observation skilfully generalized. The Board ask permission only to submit a few remarks on some of the more important topics connected with the general subject.

1. As the comfort and progress of children at school depend, to a very considerable degree, on the proper and commodious construction of school-

houses, the Board ask leave to invite the particular attention of the Legislature to their Secretary's remarks on this subject. As a general observation, it is no doubt too true, that the schoolhouses in most of the districts of the Commonwealth, are of an imperfect construction. It is apprehended that sometimes at less expense than is now incurred, and in other cases, by a small additional expense, schoolhouses much more conducive to the health and comfort, and consequently to the happiness and progress of children, might be erected. Nor would it be necessary, in most cases, in order to introduce the desired improvements, that new buildings should be constructed. Perhaps in a majority of cases, the end might be attained to a considerable degree, by alterations and additions to the present buildings. It is the purpose of the Secretary of the Board as early as practicable, to prepare and submit a special report on the construction of schoolhouses. When this document shall be laid before them, it will be for the Legislature to judge, whether any encouragement can, with good effect, be offered from the school fund, with a view to induce the towns of the Commonwealth to adopt those improvements in the construction of schoolhouses, which experience and reason show to be of great practical importance in carrying on the business of education.

2. Very much of the efficiency of the best system of school education, depends upon the fidelity and zeal with which the office of a school-committee man is performed. The Board deem it unnecessary to dilate upon a subject so ably treated by their Secretary. The difficulties to be surmounted before the services of able and faithful school-committee men can be obtained, in perhaps a majority of the towns of the Commonwealth, are confessedly great and various. They can be thoroughly overcome only by the spirit of true patriotism, generously exerting itself toward the great end of promoting the intellectual improvement of fellow-men. But it is in the power of the Legislature to remove some of the obstacles, among which not the least considerable, is the pecuniary sacrifice involved in the faithful and laborious discharge of the duties of the school committee. The Board have understood, with great satisfaction, that the subject has been brought before the House of Representatives. They know of no reason why the members of school committees should not receive a reasonable compensation, as well as other municipal officers, of whom it is not usually expected that they should serve the public gratuitously. There are none whose labors faithfully performed, are of greater moment to the general well-being. The duties of a member of a school committee, if conscientiously discharged, are onerous; and ought not to be rendered more so, by being productive of a heavy pecuniary loss, in the wholly unrequited devotion of time and labor to the public good.

3. The subject of the education of teachers has been more than once brought before the Legislature, and is of the very highest importance in connexion with the improvement of our schools. That there are all degrees of skill and success on the part of teachers, is matter of too familiar observation to need repetition; and that these must depend, in no small degree, on the experience of the teacher, and in his formation under a good discipline and method of instruction in early life, may be admitted without derogating, in any measure, from the importance of natural gifts and aptitude, in fitting men for this as for the other duties of society. Nor can it be deemed unsafe, to insist that, while occupations requiring a very humble degree of intellectual effort and attainment, demand a long-continued training, it cannot be that the arduous and manifold duties of the instructor of youth, should be as well performed without as with a specific preparation for them. In fact, it must be admitted, as the voice of reason and experience, that institutions for the formation of teachers must be established among us, before the all-important work of forming the minds of our children, can be performed in the best possible manner, and with the greatest attainable success.



No one who has been the witness of the ease and effect with which instruction is imparted by one teacher, and the tedious pains-taking and unsatisfactory progress which mark the labors of another of equal ability and knowledge, and operating on materials equally good, can entertain a doubt that there is a mastery in teaching as in every other art. Nor is it less obvious that, within reasonable limits, this skill and this mastery may themselves be made the subjects of instruction and be communicated to others.

We are not left to the deductions of reason on this subject. In those foreign countries, where the greatest attention has been paid to the work of education, schools for teachers have formed an important feature in their systems, and with the happiest result. The art of imparting instruction has been found, like every other art, to improve by cultivation in institutions established for that specific object. New importance has been attached to the calling of the instructor by public opinion, from the circumstance that his vocation has been deemed one requiring systematic preparation and culture. Whatever tends to degrade the profession of the teacher, in his own mind or that of the public, of course impairs his usefulness ; and this result must follow from regarding instruction as a business which in itself, requires no previous training.

The duties which devolve upon the teachers even of our Common Schools, particularly when attended by large numbers of both sexes, and of advanced years for learners, (as is often the case,) are various, and difficult of performance. For their faithful execution no degree of talent and qualification is too great ; and when we reflect in the nature of things that only a moderate portion of both can, in ordinary cases be expected, for the slender compensation afforded the teacher, we gain a new view of the necessity of bringing to his duties the advantage of previous training in the best mode of discharging them.

A very considerable part of the benefit, which those who attend our schools might derive from them, is unquestionably lost for want of mere skill in the business of instruction, on the part of the teacher. This falls with especial hardship on that part of our youthful population, who are able to enjoy, but for a small portion of the year, the advantage of the schools. For them it is of peculiar importance, that, from the moment of entering the school, every hour should be employed to the greatest advantage, and every facility in imparting knowledge, and every means of awakening and guiding the mind, be put into instant operation : and where this is done, two months of schooling would be as valuable as a year passed under a teacher destitute of experience and skill. The Board cannot but express the sanguine hope, that the time is not far distant, when the resources of public or private liberality will be applied in Massachusetts for the foundation of an institution for the formation of teachers, in which the present existing defect will be amply supplied.

4. The subject of district school libraries is deemed of very great importance by the Board. A foundation was made for the formation of such libraries, by the Act of 12th April, 1837, authorizing an expenditure by each district of thirty dollars, for this purpose, the first year, and ten each succeeding year. Such economy has been introduced into the business of printing, that even these small sums judiciously applied for a term of years, will amply suffice for the desired object. To the attainment of this end it is in the power of booksellers and publishers to render the most material aid. There is no reason to doubt, that if neat editions of books suitable for Common School libraries, were published and sold at a very moderate rate, plainly and substantially bound, and placed in cases well adapted for convenient transportation, and afterwards to serve as the permanent place of deposit, it would induce many of the districts in the Commonwealth to exercise the power of raising money for school libraries. A beginning once

made, steady progress would in many cases be sure to follow. Where circumstances did not admit the establishment of a library in each district, it might very conveniently be deposited a proportionate part of the year in each district successively. But it would be highly desirable that each schoolhouse should be furnished with a case and shelves, suitable for the proper arrangement and safe keeping of books. The want of such a provision, makes it almost impossible to begin the collection of a library ; and where such provision is made, the library would be nearly sure to receive a steady increase.

Although the Board are of opinion, that nothing would more promote the cause of education among us, than the introduction of libraries into our district schools, they have not deemed it advisable to recommend any measure looking to the preparation of a series of volumes, of which such a library should be composed, and their distribution, at public expense. Whatever advantages would belong to a library consisting of books expressly written for the purpose, obvious difficulties and dangers would attend such an undertaking. The Board deem it far more advisable to leave this work to the enterprise and judgement of publishers, who would, no doubt, find it for their interest, to make preparations to satisfy a demand for district school libraries in the way above indicated.

In this connexion the Board would observe, that much good might unquestionably be effected by the publication of a periodical journal or paper, of which the exclusive object should be to promote the cause of education, especially of Common School education. Such a journal, conducted on the pure principles of Christian philanthropy, of rigid abstinence from party and sect, sacredly devoted to the one object of education, to collecting and diffusing information on this subject, to the discussion of the numerous important questions which belong to it, to the formation of a sound and intelligent public opinion, and the excitement of a warm and energetic public sentiment, in favor of our schools, might render incalculable service. The Board are decidedly of opinion, that a journal of this description would be the most valuable auxiliary which could be devised, to carry into execution the enlightened policy of the government, in legislating for the improvement of the schools, and they indulge a sanguine hope that its establishment will shortly be witnessed.

5. The subject of school books is perhaps one of more immediate and pressing interest. The multiplicity of school books, and the imperfection of many of them, is one of the greatest evils at present felt in our Common Schools. The Board know of no way, in which this evil could be more effectually remedied, than by the selection of the best of each class now in use, and a formal recommendation of them by the Board of Education. Such a recommendation would probably cause them to be generally adopted ; but should this not prove effectual, and the evil be found to continue, it might hereafter be deemed expedient to require the use of the books thus recommended, as a condition of receiving a share of the benefit of the school fund.

The foregoing observations are all that now occur to the Board of Education, as proper to be made to the Legislature, in connexion with the improvement of our Common Schools. They beg leave to submit an additional remark on the subject of their own sphere of operations. It is evident, from the nature of the case, that much of the efficiency and usefulness of the Board, must depend on the zeal and fidelity of its Secretary, and that it is all important to command, in this office, the services of an individual of distinguished talent and unquestioned character. No other qualifications will inspire the confidence generally of the people, and without that confidence, it is impossible that his labors or those of the Board, should be crowned with success. The Board ask permission to state, that they deem themselves very fortunate in having engaged the services of a gentleman

so highly qualified as their Secretary, to discharge the interesting duties of his trust ; and they respectfully submit to the Legislature, the expediency of raising his compensation to an amount, which could more fairly be regarded as a satisfactory equivalent for the employment of all his time. The Board also think, that a small allowance should be made, for the contingent expenses of the Secretary in the discharge of his duties, such as postage, stationery, and occasional clerk-hire. It is just, however, to add, that this proposal for an increase of salary, is made wholly without suggestion on the part of the Secretary.

In conclusion, the Board would tender their acknowledgements to their fellow-citizens, who, by attending on the meetings of the county conventions, or in any other way, have afforded their cooperation in the promotion of the great cause of popular education. At most of these meetings, permanent county conventions for the improvement of education, have been organized. Spirited addresses have, in almost every case, emanated from the county meetings ; well calculated to impart vigor and warmth to the public sentiment in reference to the cause of education. On the whole, the Board have reason to hope, that an impulse has been given to the public mind on the subject of education, from which valuable effects may be anticipated. It will be their strenuous effort, under the auspices of the Legislature, and as far as the powers vested in them extend, to encourage and augment the interest, which has been excited, and they hope, as they shall acquire experience, that their labors will become more efficient. They do not flatter themselves, that great and momentous reforms are to be effected at once. Where the means employed are those of calm appeal to the understanding and the heart, a gradual and steady progress is all that should be desired. The schools of Massachusetts are not every thing that we could wish, but public opinion is sound in reference to their improvement. The voice of reason will not be uttered in vain. Experience, clearly stated in its results, will command respect, and the Board entertain a confident opinion that the increased attention given to the subject, will result in making our system of Common School education fully worthy of the intelligence of the present day, and of the ancient renown of Massachusetts.

All which is respectfully submitted by

EDWARD EVERETT,  
GEORGE HULL,  
JAMES G. CARTER,  
EDMUND DWIGHT,  
GEORGE PUTNAM,  
E. A. NEWTON,  
ROBERT RANTOUL, Jr.,  
JARED SPARKS.

*Boston, February 1, 1838.*

NOTE. Rev. Messrs. EMERSON DAVIS of Westfield, and THOMAS ROBBINS of Rochester, members of the Board, were prevented by the distance of their respective places of residence, from Boston, from being present at the adjourned meeting of the Board, at which the foregoing report was adopted.

#### FIRST ANNUAL REPORT OF THE SECRETARY OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION.

TO THE BOARD OF EDUCATION.

GENTLEMEN :—The act of the Legislature, under which you were constituted, authorized the appointment of a Secretary, and specifically prescribed his duties in the following words :—*the Secretary “shall, under the direction of the Board, collect information of the actual condition and efficiency of the Common Schools and other means of popular education ; and diffuse, as widely as possible, throughout every part of the Commonwealth, information of the*



*most approved and successful methods of arranging the studies and conducting the education of the young, to the end that all children in this Commonwealth, who depend upon the Common Schools for instruction, may have the best education which those schools can be made to impart."* Having accepted the office of Secretary of the Board, I entered upon the public discharge of its duties, about the close of the month of August last. But before devoting even the brief period of three months to a beginning of the work of "collecting information of the actual condition and efficiency" of about three thousand different public schools, and several hundred permanent private schools and academies, I was obliged to return to this city, in order to prepare the 'Annual Abstract of the School Returns,' which, by a law of the Commonwealth, was to be prepared and laid before the Legislature, in a printed form, on or before the second Wednesday in January inst.:—the labor of that preparation, having, by a vote of the Board, been devolved upon me. This last work has supplied me with almost incessant occupation ever since my return. It soon became a question, therefore, in my own mind, whether I ought not to consider myself debarred, by the briefness of the time, and the magnitude of the labor, from attempting, at this early period, to submit to the Board, any report, relative to the "condition and efficiency of our Common Schools and other means of popular education." But as I was perfectly satisfied, that there were a few classes of facts, and some important views, pertaining to this subject, in regard to which a more thorough examination would only supply additional facts of the same kind, and corroborate the same views by additional arguments, I thought it clearly to be my duty not to delay their communication for the sake of presenting them in a less imperfect form, or of fortifying obvious conclusions with cumulative evidence and argument.

I proceed, therefore, to state the principal sources of information consulted, together with some of the facts learned and of the conclusions formed.

Between the 28th of August and the 15th of November last, I met conventions of the friends of education in every county in the State except Suffolk. With the exception of two counties, these conventions were very fully attended, almost all the towns in the respective counties being represented. The character of the conventions for intelligence and moral worth, has probably never been surpassed. Selfish and illaudable motives do not tempt men to abandon business, and incur expense, to attend distant meetings, when no emolument is to be secured, nor offices apportioned. A desire to promote a philanthropic object, whose full beneficence will not be realized until its authors shall have left the stage, must have been the honorable impulse, which assembled them together.

Statements, uncontradicted and unquestioned, publicly made at these conventions, by gentlemen worthy of entire confidence, respecting facts alleged to be within their own personal knowledge, I have considered as worthy of full reliance.

Some weeks before commencing this tour of exploration, I addressed to the school committee of every town, a circular letter, specifying a number of topics upon which information was sought. A copy of that circular, together with the Address of the Board of Education, referred to therein, is appended to this report. Direct written answers have been received from nearly half the towns in the State, together containing more than half its population. This information I regard as of an authentic and official character.

Having, fortunately for this purpose, been so situated as to form a personal acquaintance with very many of those gentlemen, who, for the last ten years, have been members of one or the other branch of our State Legislature, I determined to avail myself, as far as practicable, of this advantage to extend into details, and render more minute and particular my infor-

mation upon the great subject intrusted to me. I think it not unworthy to be mentioned, that, for this purpose, I adopted a mode of travelling which made me perfect master of my own movements, and rendered it always convenient for me to stop and make inquiries, and to turn off my nearest course, whenever valuable information was supposed to lie on either side of my direct route. In this way I have travelled between five and six hundred miles, besides going to Dukes County and Nantucket. I have been able, by this means, to inspect the condition of many schoolhouses ; and I have personally examined, or obtained exact and specific information regarding the relative size, construction, and condition of, about eight hundred of those buildings, and general information concerning, at least, a thousand more. These, together with the school returns, which have been received this year from two hundred and ninety-four out of the three hundred and five towns in the Commonwealth, and such limited correspondence as I have been able to conduct, have been the principal sources of information consulted.

It would be depriving many persons of a most honorable tribute to which they are *completely* entitled ; and it would withhold from the friends of the sacred cause of education one of the highest satisfactions, did I omit to declare, that, neither at the conventions, which have been held in the several counties, nor in my intercourse or correspondence with any one, has there been infused into this cause the slightest ingredient of partisan politics. In regard to this great subject, all have reverted to their natural relations as fellow-men ; discarding strifes about objects which are temporary, for interests which are enduring. In a spirit of harmony and unity, having brought the facts of individual experience and observation into common stock, they have regarded them as a fund, from which the wisest results were to be wrought out by the aid of common counsels.

The object of the Common School system of Massachusetts, was to give to every child in the Commonwealth a free, straight, solid pathway, by which he could walk directly up from the ignorance of an infant to a knowledge of the primary duties of a man ; and could acquire a power and an invincible will to discharge them. Have our children such a way ? Are they walking in it ? Why do so many, who enter it, falter therein ? Are there not many who miss it altogether ? What can be done to reclaim them ? What can be done to rescue faculties, powers, divine endowments, graciously designed for individual and social good, from being perverted to individual and social calamity ? These are the questions of deep and intense interest, which I have proposed to myself, and upon which I have sought for information and counsel.

Our institutions for the education of our children, depend for their success not more upon the perfection of their individual parts, than upon their just adaptation and concurrent working. The cooperation of many different agents is essential to their prosperity. In examining the causes of failure, therefore, in a system so extensive and complex, not only ought its several parts to be scrutinized and their details mastered ; but the relation and fitness of each wheel to the whole machinery should be scanned ; because parts, individually perfect, may counterwork each other from maladjustment, and thus impair or even wholly destroy the desired results. I shall make no apology, therefore, for discarding all speculation and theory, and for descending at once to more useful, though perhaps less interesting particulars ; because nothing, however minute, can be unimportant, which will ultimately affect the value of the product.

I am bound, here, to make a preliminary remark, to be steadily kept in view as a qualification of this entire report. In pointing out errors in our system, that they may be rectified, I wish at the same time, to aver my belief in the vast preponderance of its excellencies over its defects. A specification of the latter, therefore, however extensive, is not to be under-



stood as questioning the manifold superiority of the former. So, too, in advertent to non-performances of duty in any one class or body of men, or to adverse influences, exerted by any other class, I disclaim all personal implication whatever ; believing that the defects are mainly chargeable on the system, rather than the individual ; and that, in some points, at least, the errors of the system have been rectified by the fidelity of its administrators.

There are four cardinal topics, under which all considerations, relating to our Common Schools, naturally arrange themselves. *First* in order is the situation, construction, condition, and *number* of the schoolhouses. I mention the *number* of the schoolhouses under this head, because in populous places, there is a temptation to build too few, and to compact too many scholars into one house ; while towns sparsely populated are beset with the opposite temptation, of making too minute a subdivision of their territory into districts ; and thus, in attempting to accommodate all with a schoolhouse near by, the accommodation itself is substantially destroyed. In many cases, this pursuit of the incident works a forfeiture of the principal. A schoolhouse is erected near by, but it is at the expense of having a school in it, so short, as to be of but little value.

*Secondly*, the manner, whether intelligent and faithful, or inadequate and neglectful, in which school-committee men discharge their duties.

*Thirdly*, the interest felt by the community in the education of *all* its children ; and the position in which a certain portion of that community stand in relation to the free schools.

*Fourthly*, the competency of teachers.

*First*. When it is considered, that more than five-sixths of all the children in the State spend a considerable portion of the most impressible period of their lives in our schoolhouses, the general condition of those buildings and their influences upon the young, stand forth, at once, as topics of prominence and magnitude. The construction of schoolhouses connects itself closely with the love of study, with proficiency, health, anatomical formation, and length of life. These are great interests, and therefore suggest great duties. It is believed that, in some important particulars, their structure can be improved without the slightest additional expense ; and that, in other respects, a small advance in cost would be returned a thousand fold in the improvement of those habits, tastes, and sentiments of our children, which are so soon to be developed into public manners, institutions, and laws, and to become unchangeable history. But this topic of schoolhouse architecture is too extensive for present examination. It is my intention, as early as practicable, to prepare a separate report, which shall comprise under one view, and in some detail, the essentials of an edifice devoted to the improvement of the whole life, by improving its beginning.

*Secondly*. School-committee men, both prudential and superintending, occupy a controlling position in relation to our Common Schools. They are the administrators of the system ; and in proportion to the fidelity and intelligence, exercised by them, the system will flourish or decline.

Although it is not always in the power of school committees to introduce into the schools devoted and accomplished teachers ; yet it is in their power, and it is a most responsible and solemn part of their duty, not to inflict upon the children of a whole district the calamity of an ignorant, ill-tempered, or profane teacher. It is no trivial arbitrement to decide, whether a school shall be a blessing or a nuisance, and therefore the question of a teacher's fitness is not to be guessed at, but solemnly pondered. If the husbandman by any effort of body or of mind, by toil or supplication, could foredoom and predestinate what sort of seasons should spread mildew and barrenness over his fields, and leave him empty granaries, or, what should make his pastures luxuriant and heap his garner ; he surely would not be content

with conjecture, with superficial and scanty inquiry, or with hasty decisions. And yet what the seasons are to the fields and crops of the farmer, the teacher is to the children of the school. Nay more ; he is season and cultivation also. No part, therefore, of the examination of applicants for schools is form. It is all substance. It is all pregnant with good or evil ; because the certificate of the committee is a commission to the teacher, under which he may usurp a place to do but little good, where another would do much ; or, under which, perhaps, he may do great and remediless harm, without any admixture of good.

The law of 1826 required school committees to obtain evidence of the good moral character of all instructors, and to ascertain "by personal examination *or otherwise*, their literary qualifications and capacity for the government of schools." In the Revised Statutes, the words "*or otherwise*" were intentionally omitted. Hence the duty of *personal examination* became, in all cases, imperative. So great, however, is the tax, imposed by this requirement upon the time of the committees, that from the best information I have been able to obtain, I am led to believe, that in a majority of instances, the examination is either wholly omitted, or is formal and superficial, rather than intent and thorough.

The engagement of a teacher by the prudential committee, subject to the approval of the committee of the town, is itself a step of great importance ; because there are intrinsic objections to the use of the veto power, by the latter, and it can never be exercised without reluctance and hazard. The prudential committee ought not, therefore, to be compelled to close a bargain at the first offer, but he should have opportunity for full inquiries, or, at least, for availing himself of such information as might come in his way, during the season. The law fixes no time for the election of prudential committee men, when chosen by the districts. In some large districts, through which I passed late in the autumn, that officer had not then been chosen for the current year. When chosen, he could have no opportunity for extended inquiry or discriminating selection, but would be almost compelled to employ the first person whom chance should throw in his way.

Again ; the law expressly requires every teacher to obtain, from the school committee of the town, a certificate of his qualifications, "*before he opens the school.*" This implies, that it is a violation of duty on the part of a teacher to open a school, previously to obtaining such a certificate ; and also, on the part of the town committee, to examine a teacher after he has opened his school, for the purpose of giving him a retroactive certificate. Magistrates and officers might as well enter upon the discharge of their duties, with the expectation of being qualified sometime before or after the close of their official term. The reason for this prohibition upon teachers and committees is unanswerable. After the teacher has intruded into the school without a certificate, other considerations, besides fitness, come in, and strenuously urge, if they do not morally compel, the committee to give him one. Just before a school begins, parents generally make arrangements for dispensing with the personal services of their children. Some take them away from regular and profitable employments. During the first few weeks of a school, the children never study with the same facility, nor are they able to make the same progress, as afterwards. Even men cannot rally and apply their whole mental forces, on the first day of commencing an unaccustomed work. It is a subject of universal regret with good teachers of short schools, that as soon as the school has gathered impetus, it is arrested. A change of teachers, when a school has just opened, is, in itself, a great misfortune ; because different persons have different regulations and different modes of administering them. In all schools, the harness of good order and discipline will chafe a little at first, and some time must elapse before it will sit easy. At the opening of a school, a teacher ought to learn the proficiency of his scholars, for the

purpose of arranging classes, and as a basis of judicious advice in regard to advanced studies. In the course of two or three weeks, a teacher of any discernment will get an insight respecting the peculiar temperament and disposition of each scholar, and he will find avenues, or open them, by which a readier access can be had to his pupils' minds. A school will but partially develop its powers of advancement, until teacher and pupils become acquainted; until the standing relations between them are established, and their minds are so mutually fitted into each other as to work without friction. Suppose, at this moment, when the school ought to be under strong headway, the teacher is presented to the committee for examination and approval; and, in addition to such considerations as those above suggested, the prudential committee enforces the demand of a certificate with the plea, that it is now too late in the season to obtain any better substitute. Now, the painful alternative may be directly presented, either to approve an incompetent teacher, or to reject him and break up the school:—two modes about equally efficient in ruining the school for that season. Between these evils, however, there is a choice;—a badly kept school being worse than none. Yet the first is the branch of the alternative far the most likely to be accepted; because the evil of breaking up the school is instant and impending, while that of its continuance, though greater, is remote; and it is a rule, lamentably prevalent in the actions of men, that when a less but immediate evil comes in competition with one far greater, but more remote, the former prevails. The malignity of the case is, that it enlists all the good motives of the committee on the bad side.

From facts, which have come to my knowledge, I am constrained to believe, that, in *two thirds* at least of the towns in the Commonwealth, this provision of the law is more or less departed from. And in the great majority of cases, where an examination is had, previous to the opening of the school, it takes place on the very eve of its commencement, when the evils above enumerated, must partially ensue from a rejection of the candidate, and, therefore, undue motives in favor of granting a certificate must have a proportionate force.

Another evasion of much rarer occurrence, though of a far more mischievous tendency, is, that the school is kept for the stipulated period, and then the prudential committee gives the teacher an order on the town treasurer, and the town treasurer pays the money, without any certificate ever having been obtained or applied for. Indeed, the relation between the prudential and the town committee, in regard to the employment of teachers, contains in itself an element of variance or hostility, which is oftentimes developed into open rupture, and more often, perhaps, suppressed, by injurious yielding and acquiescence on the part of the latter. So manifest is this tendency, and so unhappy its consequences, that very many judicious men maintain the expediency of vesting the whole power of employing teachers in the town committee.

Another duty of the town committee, is that of directing what books shall be used in the schools. There is a public evil of great magnitude in the multiplicity and diversity of elementary books. They crowd the market, and infest the schools. One would suppose there might be uniformity in rudiments, at least; yet the greatest variety prevails. Some books claim superiority, because they make learning easy, and others, because they make it difficult. All decry their predecessors, or profess to have discovered new and better modes of teaching. By a change of books, a child is often obliged to unlearn what he had laboriously acquired before. In many important particulars, the pronunciation, the orthography, and the syntax of our language changes, according to the authority consulted. Truth and philosophy, in regard to teaching, assume so many shapes, that common minds begin to doubt, whether there be truth or philosophy under any. The advantages of cheapness, resulting from improvements in the art of



printing, are intercepted from the public, to whom they rightfully belong, and divided among compilers. Over this, as an expensive public mischief, as a general discouragement to learning, and as a misfortune of the Commonwealth, town committees have no control. But it is still in their power, and it is an important and substantial part of their duty, as enjoined by law, "to direct what books shall be used in the several schools," in their respective towns. When the committee fail in directing what books shall be used, a way is opened for the introduction of books which are expressly prohibited by law, as "calculated to favor the tenets of particular sects of Christians." Under such omission, also, the schoolhouse may cease to be neutral ground between those different portions of society, now so vehemently contending against each other on a variety of questions of social and national duty. Instances of both kinds have occurred, and were, under such circumstances, to be expected; because it is the nature of extreme views to make all other truths bow down before the idolized truth. But the liability and the temptation should be cut off. Would the disciples of hostile doctrines look forward, and foresee what results a breach of the truce in regard to the schoolroom must infallibly lead, it seems scarcely credible, that each should not agree, in good faith, to refrain from every attempt to preoccupy the minds of school children with his side of vexed and complicated questions, whether of state, or theology; and that all should not concur, in regard to an evil so self-propagating and ruinous, in enforcing measures, which would bar out the possibility of its occurrence. The only reason, urged by school committees for a noncompliance with the provision of law in relation to selecting books, is, that parents object to the expense of purchasing so many new books, as would give uniform sets to the school. Hence the evil is endued with a self-perpetuating power; because, as it increases, the obstacle to its removal increases also. Where a diversity of books prevails in a school, there will necessarily be unfitness and maladjustment in the classification of scholars. Those who ought to recite together are separated by a difference of books. If eight or ten scholars, in geography, for instance, have eight or ten different books, as has sometimes happened, instead of one recitation for all, there must be eight or ten recitations. Thus the teacher's time is crumbled into dust and dissipated. Put a question to a class of ten scholars, and wait a moment for each one to prepare an answer in his own mind, and then name the one to give the answer, and there are ten mental operations going on simultaneously; and each one of the ten scholars will profit more by this social recitation, than he would by a solitary one of the same length. But if there must be ten recitations, instead of one, the teacher is, as it were, divided by ten, and reduced to the tenth part of a teacher. Nine tenths of his usefulness is destroyed. The same would be true in regard to most other studies. This irretrievable loss is incurred, merely because parents will not agree to procure the best books.

It would seem, beforehand, that no duty of school committees could be more acceptable to parents, than that of enforcing a uniformity of books in all the schools of a town. Every school, where there are no regulations upon this subject, holds out a standing invitation to every book-pedlar and speculator, to foist in his books, which may be new, or they may be books whose sheets have been printed for years, but garnished with a new title-page bearing a recent date. The diversity may be aggravated through the intervention of the teacher, who often desires to introduce the books from which he, himself, learnt, or has been accustomed to teach. But if the books are prescribed, all applications for a change must be made directly to the committee, and imposition becomes impracticable, or, at least, the chances of it are very much reduced. While the diversity continues, each succeeding teacher will urge the children to procure his favorite books; the children will importune their parents, and enough of them will prevail

to perpetuate the mischief. There cannot be a doubt, that the aggregate expense of books, for any given number of years, will be much greater in towns where the committee are thwarted by the parents in the discharge of this duty, than in towns where it is duly performed. In this, as in any other operation or business, whatever, the absence of system and prearrangement doubles cost and halves profits. Families can rarely remove from one town to another, and, very often, they cannot, even from one district to another in the same town, without incurring the expense of a new set of books for their children. This bears, in every respect, most hardly upon the poor.

Notwithstanding the manifest advantages of a performance of this branch of duty, and the grievous mischiefs resulting from its neglect, it is neglected in about *one hundred towns*, or one third part of the towns in the Commonwealth.

The law further provides, that, in case any scholar shall not be furnished by his parent, master, or guardian, with the requisite books, "he shall be supplied therewith at the expense of the town." Few things seem more preposterous, than to send children to school or to keep them there, for the purpose of *not* studying. Half a dozen children, stationed in different parts of a school, with nothing to do for want of books, will soon enlist three times their number in the same service. In not less than forty towns, is this duty wholly omitted. Children attend school, surrounded by temptations to mischief, and without any means of occupation.

An inquiry into the "regulation and discipline" of the schools, is another of the duties enjoined upon the town committee; and so important is this duty, in the judgment of the law, that its performance is commanded, not only at the opening and close of the schools, but at each of the monthly visitations. Under this head, many points are embraced, vital to the cause of Common School education. I will give but a single example. The "regulation" of a school, comprises the means of insuring as much punctuality and regularity as possible in the attendance of all the children in the district. Absences and tardiness are great obstructions to progress. The punctual are injured by them hardly less than the delinquent. In some towns, the excellent practice of keeping daily registers by the teachers, to be exhibited to the committee at each visitation; of holding the scholars to a strict account for all absences, and of discouraging desertion from the school by all other practicable means, has obviated almost all delinquencies of this kind. In other towns, where the attendance upon school is prompted by no motive, nor enforced by any salutary regulation; habits of idleness and truanship in the present children, are laying the foundations of vagrancy, poverty, and vice in the future men.

In connexion with this topic of the "regulation" of a school, as one of the means of securing punctuality in the attendance of scholars, it is material to advert to another provision of the law, which makes it the joint and several duty of school committees, resident ministers of the gospel, and selectmen, "in their several towns, to exert their influence and use their best endeavors, that the youth of their towns shall regularly attend the schools established for their instruction." The success attendant upon the exertions of these officers, to secure a "regular" attendance upon schools, will appear by the following statement.

The whole number of children, in the 294 towns which have made returns, who are between *four* and *sixteen* years of age, is 177,053

If from this number we deduct twelve thousand, as the number of children, who attend private schools and academies, and do not attend the public schools at all, there will remain 165,053

Whole number of scholars of *all ages*, attending school in winter 141,837

Whole number of scholars of *all ages*, attending school in summer 122,889

The *average* attendance in winter, is 111,520

Do. Do. in summer, is 94,956

So that the average attendance, in winter, of children of *all ages*, falls below the whole number of children in the State between 4 and 16 years of age, who depend wholly upon the Common Schools, 53,533

And in summer it falls below that number 70,097

That is, a portion of the children, dependent wholly upon the Common Schools, absent themselves from the winter school, either permanently or occasionally, equal to a permanent absence of about one third of their whole number ; and a portion absent themselves from the summer schools, either permanently or occasionally, equal to a permanent absence of considerably more than two fifths of their whole number.

The average length of all the schools in the two hundred and ninety-four towns heard from, is six months and twenty-five days each, for the whole year. Were the winter and summer terms equal in length, this average would give three months and twelve days and a half to each. But, on account of the voluntary absences from school, the winter term is reduced to the scholars, on an average, to about two months and one week, and the summer term to two months, and an inconsiderable fraction ; or taking both winter and summer terms, to about four months and one week in the year. And so much as some scholars, dependent upon the Common School, actually attend school more, just so much, do others actually attend less.

Were it certain that the number, *one hundred and seventy-seven thousand and fifty-three*, was not an over-estimate of the children between four and sixteen years of age ; and did the returns embrace all the children of all ages attending in all the public schools, it would appear that forty-two thousand one hundred and sixty-four children, wholly dependent upon the Common Schools, have not, the past year, attended school at all in the summer ; and twenty-three thousand two hundred and sixteen, neither in summer nor winter. There is some reason to believe, that from omissions in the returns, and, perhaps, from other causes, the total of the children of all ages, attending all the schools, is rather too low. After making every possible allowance, however, the returns exhibit frightful evidence of the number of children, who either do not go to school at all, or go so little as not to be reckoned among the scholars.

In this State, where the traditional habits and usages of the people exact some term of apprenticeship for all arts—except for the most difficult of all, the art of teaching—an intelligent and assiduous committee can do much, by way of counsel and sympathy, to encourage teachers, if not to capacitate them for the discharge of their delicate and arduous work. No person, fitted by Nature even for a temporary guardianship of the young, if not specially taught and skilled for his office, can remain in school a single week, without a deep consciousness of incapacity for interesting, guiding, and elevating the beings, intrusted to his tutelage. In this condition of things, the committee are his only resource ; and, if they also are incompetent to counsel and enlighten, accident and darkness must preside over the education of our youth.

Another important duty enjoined upon school committees is the visitation of the schools. Such visitations may be a moral incitement to the scholars, of great efficacy. Advice, encouragement, affectionate persuasion, coming from such of their townsmen as the children have been accustomed to regard with respect or veneration, will sink deep and remain long in their hearts. Wise counsel from acknowledged superiors makes a deep impress. It comes with the momentum of a heavy body, falling from a great height. The same counsel, if the same could be had, from men, whom the children hold in no respect or esteem, might be remembered only to be ridiculed. The visitations of the committee break in upon the monotony of the school. They spur the slothful, and reward the emulous and aspiring. To suppose that the children in a school will ever feel a keen, impulsive interest in learning, while parents and neighbors are disregardful of it, is to suppose the children to be wiser than the men. The stimulus of acting under the



public eye, though an inferior motive, is still an allowable one, amongst adults. To the mind of the sworn officer, is it not more present than his oath? Do not much of the uprightness and thoroughness brought to the discharge of public duties, depend upon their being performed under public inspection? And why, in regard to children, may we not avail ourselves of this innate sentiment as an auxiliary in the attainment of knowledge; always holding it subordinate to the supreme sentiment of duty? I have heard hundreds of teachers, with one voice, attest its utility. Such visitations by the committee, are not less useful to teachers, than to pupils. While all due respect should be accorded to teachers—and certainly no class in the community are more deserving both of emolument and of social consideration, than they—yet as our school system is now administered, we are not authorized to anticipate any more fidelity and strenuousness in the fulfilment of duty from them, than from the same number of persons engaged in any reputable employment. This State employs, annually, in the Common Schools, more than three thousand teachers, at an expense of more than *four hundred and sixty-five thousand dollars*, raised by direct taxation. But they have not one thousandth part the supervision which watches the same number of persons, having the care of cattle or spindles, or of the retail of shopgoods. Who would retain his reputation, not for prudence, but for sanity, if he employed men on his farm, or in his factory, or clerks in his counting-room, month after month, without oversight and even without inquiry? In regard to what other service, are we so indifferent, where the remuneration swells to such an aggregate?

Being deeply impressed with these views, I inserted in the circular an interrogatory upon this subject, and wherever I have been, I have made constant inquiries whether this duty of visitation were performed, agreeably to law. I have heard from nearly all the towns in the State. The result is, that not in more than fifty or sixty towns, out of the three hundred and five, has there been any pretence of a compliance with the law; and in regard to some of these towns, after a reference to the requisitions of the statute, the allegation of a compliance has been withdrawn, as having been made in ignorance of the extent of its provisions.

It would be unjust to attribute the omission even of this important duty to any peculiar deadness or dormancy, on the part of committees, towards the great interest of our Common Schools. No body of men in the community have performed services for the public, at all comparable to theirs, for so little of the common inducements of honor and emolument. In not more than about one fifth part of the towns, do the committee receive either compensation or reimbursement for devoting from six to sixty days of time to the duties of their office, and for incurring expenses of horse and carriage hire, amounting to *ten or twenty*, and sometimes even to *thirty* dollars per annum. Where any thing is given, it rarely exceeds a quarter of the lowest wages of day labor. The towns paying most liberally, I believe, are Falmouth and Sandwich, in the county of Barnstable, where one dollar a day, and six pence a mile for travel, are given. In a very few other towns, the compensation is fixed at seventy-five cents for each visit, (understood to occupy a full half day;) in a few more, fifty cents a visit is paid; but in most other cases, it is a small fixed sum to be given to the chairman or the secretary of the committee, or to be divided between the members of the board;—as in *Lincoln*, ten dollars to the chairman; in *Haverhill* and *Hingham*, ten dollars to the clerk or secretary; in *East Hampton*, eight dollars for the whole board; in *Cummington* and *Wareham*, five dollars for each member; in *Franklin*, three dollars for each; in *Williamsburgh*, once, nine dollars for all, and so forth. To the inquiry, *Whether paid or not?* the letter of the answer in some cases, and, in many others, the spirit of it, has been, “*Neither paid nor thanked.*” In many cases, where gentlemen have served gratuitously in the office for several years, and have then presented a bill for expenses merely, they have been dropped from

the board for the ensuing year : in others, where, after having served for years in succession, and, having been reelected; they have offered to accept, on condition of receiving half as much as was allowed for working upon the highways, as a means of defraying their expenses, the offer has been rejected by a vote of the town, and the vacancy more cheaply filled. Neither does there seem to be any social consideration attached to the station. While the office of selectman and of representative to the general court, is often an object of avidity, the more useful, responsible, and intrinsically-honorable office of school-committee man, is shunned as thankless and burdensome. It is not to be disguised, that, in many places, it encounters opposition and reproach, just in proportion to the fidelity with which its obligations are observed. In many of the principal towns in the Commonwealth, committee men have been chosen, year after year, by not more than ten or twenty votes ; and, upon their declining, the vacancies have been filled by as small a number. In one town, containing three hundred voters, they were once chosen by three votes. In many places it is strikingly observable, that persons desirous of certain other offices, are especially wary of this. In others, again, it has been necessary to resort to the expedient of electing persons not present at the meeting, in order that the office might be nominally filled. Other towns, again, have chosen them, in order to avoid the penalty of the law, and to obtain their distributive share of the school fund, with an express understanding that they should discharge none of their duties, except making their return to the Secretary of State.

Dormancy and deadness, therefore, in regard to this plastic institution, now moulding and fashioning the beings upon whom all the interests of society are so soon to devolve, seem chargeable upon the people, who not only deny all remuneration for the loss of time, and even all reimbursement for expenses incurred ; but many of whom thwart and baffle the due administration of the office, and render the duties they impose onerous and unwelcome. Hence it often happens, that the citizens, best qualified for the station, decline its acceptance ; or, having accepted it, they abridge its labors, and thereby curtail its usefulness. Clergymen allege, that their relation to the schools has been modified by recent legislation. Their parishes were once territorial, now they are poll ; and thus the special relation they once sustained to all the schools within their territory, is dissolved. Once they owed a special debt to society for their immunity from taxation ; now that obligation is cancelled. From this or some other cause it has happened, that a public school, kept the whole twelve months, in a place where several clergymen were constantly resident, has never been visited by any of them for a succession of years. Public men and professional men decline the service on account of their various engagements. The industrious aver, that "time is money ;" thus alleging a maxim, designed only to enforce a lower duty, as a justification for disregarding a higher ; and forgetting that it is no more true that "time is money," than it is that "time is knowledge, or wisdom, or virtue," because it may be converted into the latter, as easily and certainly as into the former. But, I repeat, the fault is in the system, more than in the individuals. At every convention I have attended, from every intelligent individual with whom I have conversed, no opinion has been so universal and emphatic, as that our institution of Common Schools will continue to languish and cannot be revived, until wise boards of school-committee men shall, themselves, be a living exposition of the law ; and shall make all its provisions in regard to the "examination of teachers," the "selection" and "supply" of books, the "visitation" and "the regulation and discipline of the schools," and "the habits and proficiency of the scholars," as legible in their actions as on the pages of the statute book.

(To be continued in our next Number.)